

Achan's Sin and Judgment

Joshua 7:13-26

Joshua 7:13-26 - *"Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you."'¹⁴ In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man.¹⁵ Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel."*¹⁶ So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.¹⁷ He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites; and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken.¹⁸ Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

¹⁹ Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."²⁰ And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done:²¹ When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it.²³ And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.²⁴ Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor.²⁵ And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.²⁶ Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day."

Background Notes

The name Ai means "ruins," but, believe it or not, the ruins of Ai have still not been located with certainty. The location of the traditional site of the tel has some dating and directional problems. Recently another site known as Kirbet el-Maqatir has been proposed as being the site of Ai, and it is being further excavated.

In any case, Israel was defeated at Ai after a major victory at Jericho. Why? Were the Canaanites stronger? No! Israel was weaker! They were defeated because of disobedience, because of overconfidence, and because of lack of communication with the Lord. What a lesson for us!

In the second half of Joshua 7, Achan was singled out as the root of the problem. Achan had not only stolen forbidden treasure, but he had hidden the stolen goods, and he hidden the truth as well -- until the last minute. Finally, he confessed his sin to Joshua, but not until he was found out (v19-21).

Achan and his family were stoned to death, and then their bodies were burned with fire. This punishment may seem to be overly harsh, but before you jump to the conclusion that God was too harsh in His judgment of Achan, think of these points:

1. Achan was directly responsible for the deaths of at least thirty-six men (and maybe more; see verse 5).
2. Achan had robbed God. He had not just robbed Jericho - he had robbed God! The precious metals of Jericho were designated for God's treasury.
3. Achan never repented! Yes, he confessed, but the text never says that he showed remorse and repented of his sin.

The Bible doesn't specifically say his wife was stoned, but she was put to death because she probably knew about the robbery and cover-up. It's pretty hard to bury stuff in the middle of your tent without your wife knowing what's going on! The children must have known and covered up the sin, too, because in Deuteronomy 24:16 the Law says, *"Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin."* After the judgment was carried out, we read that anger of the Lord subsided (v26).

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Believers must scrutinize their lives for the sin causing defeat.

The Lord could have easily pointed out Achan to Joshua as the root of the problem, but the Lord chose to have Israel go through a systematic examination in order to locate Achan. Most likely this process was done by drawing lots, and God controlled the results. As the tribes passed in review, the lot for the tribe of Judah was taken. As the families of Judah passed in review, slowly but surely the lots zeroed in on Achan (v16-18).

Why did God select this method for Joshua and Israel to identify Achan as the culprit? Why not just point him out? Well, going through this review process certainly gave Achan enough time to come forward, voluntarily confess and repent before he was discovered. Maybe if Achan had come forward and confessed his sin voluntarily, God might have shown mercy – as when King David committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Furthermore, this slow selection process would give all the people of Israel a chance to examine themselves before the Lord. This is always good for spiritual health (v13). This whole process would have had a sobering effect on all of Israel.

And then, there's the spiritual lesson for us, our doctrinal point: believers must scrutinize their lives for the sin that is causing defeat! When we suffer defeat in our lives as believers, we must let our lives pass in review before the spotlight of God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

Are you suffering defeat in your Christian life right now, and you don't know where the problem is? Scrutinize your life before the Word of God. Let your life pass in review before the spotlight of God's Word. All aspects of your life – your business life, your social life, your sex life, your Christian service life, your public life, and your private life. Scrutinize all aspects of your life before the spotlight of God's Word. This is what David meant in Psalm 139:23, 24: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* Are you willing to pray that prayer?

As God revealed Achan, the troubler, step by step, so God will reveal the sin that is causing defeat in your life. Sometimes it's in an area where you least expect that there's a problem, just as no one would have thought Israel's problem would show up in the tribe of Judah -- a major tribe, a prestigious tribe! Believers must scrutinize their lives for the sin causing defeat.

2. Believers must deal decisively with the sin that is causing defeat.

It was one thing to pinpoint Achan as the troubler, but the problem had to be judged and eliminated before Israel could move on. In the same way, we must not only scrutinize our lives and locate the sin that is causing defeat, but we must also eliminate the sin. The judgment of Achan may seem unduly harsh to us, but if this sin hadn't been dealt with decisively, the door would have been left open for the Israelites to tolerate all kinds of sin in the future.

We must deal decisively with the sin that is causing defeat. So, if you're spending so much time in your business so that you're robbing God of His time, then you've got to cut back. You've got to take drastic action – even if your business suffers. If certain TV shows or movies are causing a problem in your life, then don't watch them! Turn the shows off or throw the DVDs out – or maybe even get rid of your TV. We know a Christian family that literally threw away their TV! Now that's taking decisive action -- that's taking drastic action.

Believers must deal decisively with sin that is causing defeat. This is what our Lord meant in Matthew 18:8-9 - *"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire."*⁹ *And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and*

cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." Of course, our Lord didn't mean that we should literally maim ourselves – what He did mean that we must take drastic action against anything that causes us to sin! Believers must deal decisively with sin that is causing defeat.

There is certainly a collective application here as well. Church and ministry leaders must deal with sin decisively. At Emmaus Bible College, sometimes we must suspend or expel a student from the college because of a particular sin. Church elders sometimes have to expel a person from the fellowship because of sin. Before the Lord, and with much prayer, leaders must deal decisively with sin. It's not pleasant, and there will always be people who think the penalty is too harsh, but believers must deal decisively with sin causing defeat.

Practical Application

Don't travel the "Achan trail."

What is the "Achan trail"? Verse 21: *"When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."* I saw - I coveted - I took!

Don't travel the Achan trail. Eve traveled the Achan trail in Genesis 3. She saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the eyes, she desired it because it would make one wise, and she took its fruit and ate. And we know the rest of the story. David traveled the Achan trail in 2 Samuel 11 we read that he saw Bathsheba, he desired Bathsheba, and he took Bathsheba. And that sin resulted in years of strife and sorrow in his family. Don't travel the Achan trail.

Are you on the Achan trail right now? Have you seen something, and now you're coveting that something, and it's just a matter of time before you take that something? Some people think that they can travel the Achan trail and not get burned, but here's what James 1:14-15 says, *"Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

Don't think that you can travel the Achan trail and get away with it. You will destroy yourself, and you will destroy others around you. Don't travel the Achan trail.